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Dirty Business

Once the Army decided, for whatever reason, that it wasn't going to try those Green Berets officers for murdering a South Vietnamese civilian, the decent thing to do was to exonerate them.

Instead, Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor phrased his announcement in such a way as to imply that the Army considered the men guilty. --- Without a trial.

The charges were dropped, said Resor, because the Central Intelligence Agency refused to let its agents testify at the trial because reasons. "national security" What is one to conclude but that the Army still considered they should be tried, still considered them guilty, but was forced to drop the thing because of the CIA?

In a country where a man is considered innocent until proved otherwise, this is, to put it bluntly, a damned dirty way of doing business. The Army proved nothing against these men, but it did prove its own lack of common sense, decency and integrity in the way it handled the case from beginning to end.

Secretary Resor's announcement raises some grim and potentially explosive questions.

If the national security was involved, then why did not the CIA

inform the Army that it would refuse to testify before the charges were made and the United States was given a propaganda black eye?

Or did the CIA tell the Army at the beginning, and the Army went ahead and charged the men anyway, knowing it would never be able to bring them to trial?

The implications of these questions are frightening to anyone concerned with integrity of our military commanders and their civilian bosses.

Who was responsible for permitting those men to be charged, and the United States blackened by the disclosure? Was it the CIA? Or the Army? Or the Nixon Administration in charge of the Pentagon? Are we asked to believe that President Nixon was not informed that the charges were going to be made, of that they were going to be dropped? He would have to be told; because of the politically explosive nature of the case and its repercussions throughout the world. Of course, he may not have been, in which case heads will roll. . .

Eventually the truth will come out and the American public will: be told who was responsible for publicizing this affair without first ascertaining that the charges could be substantiated in court. That person, or persons - for it may have

been a joint, bureaucratic decision - should be removed from office and-or rank. For they are guilty of inflicting a gigantic propaganda defeat upon their own country and of smirching the reputations of the Green Berets officers. They have shamed their country and its armed forces and those eight individuals. Somebody, somewhere along the line, had to make the decision to prosecute - and publicize.

So far as the American public knows, there is no evidence that the civilian "double agent" the Green Berets are accused of murdering, is, in fact, dead, or that any crime has been committed. Surely, producing proof of the agent's death could not compromise the national security of this country. Such proof, of course, would not prove that the Green Berets killed the man. But it would show that a crime has been committed.

As it is, the stigma of the messy affair will follow these officers the rest of their lives. They have been accused of murder in particularly foul circumstances, and they have not been exonerated. They have merely been set free, with a great show of reluctance.

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